

Visual and Oral Feedback to Promote Appropriate Social Behavior for a Student With Emotional and Behavioral Disorders

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ABSTRACT: On a routine basis, educators collect data on their students' academic and social performance to make informed decisions regarding curricular and social instruction. The authors conducted a case study for a student with emotional and behavioral disorders. The student's teacher provided oral and visual feedback during reading instruction. Data suggest that the combination of oral and visual feedback improved the student's appropriate behavior better than did oral feedback alone. As a result, school administrators reintegrated the student into a general education classroom for reading instruction. The authors provide implications for classroom practice.

KEYWORDS: *emotional and behavioral disorders, feedback, graphing*

FOR THE PAST 5 MIN, STUDENTS in a reading class have been sitting at their desks with their literature books turned to page 69—all except Joyce. The reading instructor, Mr. Lane, has prompted Joyce three times to open her book and is now standing next to her desk. Joyce says, “You can’t make me” and smiles as she looks around at her peers. Mr. Lane makes a fourth request for Joyce to open her book and stop misbehaving. Joyce laughs and continues to disobey. As a result of her noncompliance, Mr. Lane instructs her to go back to her resource classroom. During the past 2 weeks, Joyce has been sent to the resource classroom three times because of inappropriate behavior during reading instruction; this is her fourth time. Joyce skips from the room laughing, and when she arrives at the resource classroom, she announces to her resource teacher, “I’m back.” Joyce is currently receiving a failing grade in reading class because of missing teacher instruction and not turning in assignments.

On a routine basis, educators collect data on their students' academic and social performance. This data collection can be informal (e.g., anecdotal records) or formal (e.g., direct observations). Educators collect data to make informed decisions on how to best provide curricular and

social instruction to their students. For example, collected data may indicate that a specific instructional approach is not producing the expected student behavior and therefore needs to be changed or altered in some way. It may also indicate that the approach is working and the teacher needs to systematically fade it. For educators of students with emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD), these data may be shared directly with the student in the form of feedback, with the goal of positively influencing appropriate academic and social behavior.

Kerr and Nelson (2006) stated that feedback “typically occurs as a consequence of particular behaviors” (p. 57). In general terms, it is considered a “consequence of performance” (Hattie & Timperley, 2007, p. 81). Feedback has been highlighted as an important teaching strategy that can be used to facilitate student learning (Konold, Miller, & Konold, 2004; Stronge, 2002). Researchers studying the effectiveness of feedback have indicated that some types of feedback are more effective than others. Hattie and Timperley reported that studies showing the highest effect sizes involve students receiving information feedback about a specific task and how to complete it more successfully. In addition, effective feedback includes cues or reinforcement and relates to goals (Hattie & Timperley).

The use of feedback with students with EBD is a recommended strategy (Kerr & Nelson, 2006). Educators can give feedback or share data with students with EBD by using a variety of methods such as verbal or visual (or a combination of verbal and visual) feedback. Therefore, the purpose of the present article is to provide educators with

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information and an example of how to use feedback with students with EBD. In addition, we present an overview of the types of feedback, followed by a case study that demonstrates how feedback can be used to improve student outcomes.

Types of Feedback

Oral. Oral feedback is a common method for sharing data with students with EBD. Using this method, educators verbally tell students how they are performing, with immediate feedback reported as more effective in reducing problem behavior than delayed feedback (e.g., Price, Martella, Marchand-Martella, & Cleanthous, 2002). For example, an educator may tell a student who is working on improving his or her spelling performance, "Great job on your spelling test. You spelled 70% of the words correctly. That's an improvement of two words from last week. Keep up the good work." Regarding a student who is working on sharing skills during free time, an educator may say, "I liked the way you asked Betsy to play cards with you. You did a nice job sharing the cards with her." In these examples, the student is not privy to the specific data collected or methods used to collect the data. Instead, educators use the data to frame their oral feedback on the student by sharing observations and encouraging future displays of target (i.e., appropriate) behavior from the student. For some students, oral feedback can influence future target behavior; for other students, oral feedback may not be powerful enough to produce the desired effects (Kerr & Nelson, 2006).

Visual. Visual feedback is also a common method that educators use to promote appropriate behavior for students with EBD (e.g., for graphic examples, see Faykus & McCurdy, 1998; for video examples, see Falk, Dunlap, & Kern, 1996; Kern et al., 1995; Walthur & Beare, 1991; for written examples, see McLaughlin, 1992). In many special education classrooms, educators visually display collected data on charts posted on classroom walls, affixed to clipboards, or stored in student folders. For example, students may be working on turning in their homework every morning. For these students, every morning that they place their homework in the homework bin, they affix a sticker on the chart, indicating that they met their goal. The chart is hung from the homework bin and serves as a visual reminder of the goal and students' progress. (To ensure that confidentiality is not violated, teachers should be cautioned to follow school district guidelines regarding the posting of student progress.) Another example is students who receive updated graphs of their reading rate performance on the basis of previous readings that were taped on a tape recorder. In this scenario, the teacher hands students their reading folder, which has the reading rate graph of daily progress and overall goal, along with a written prompt to read a new passage. In these examples, the educator does not provide oral

feedback but allows the visual display of data to be the feedback. Many times, visual feedback is paired with a tangible reward. Students who turn in homework assignments may earn a homework pass for 7 consecutive days of stickers on their chart. Similarly, students who read more words per minute may receive the privilege of checking out an extra library book at the end of the week.

Oral and visual. Oral and visual feedback is a combination of an educator verbally telling students the specifics of their performance with encouragement to continue displaying the target behavior while simultaneously showing students their graphed data. Some students, such as Joyce in our case study, need a combination of oral and visual feedback to meet the desired behavior.

Joyce: A Case Study

Joyce was an African American fifth-grade student with EBD who had been repeatedly removed from her general education reading class because of her frequent inappropriate behavior. At the time of the case study, she read slightly below grade level. Her general education teachers stated that Joyce was verbally aggressive, violent, noncompliant, and generally out of control during instructional activities. They often resorted to sending her back to the resource classroom because of her disruptive behaviors. However, once back in the resource classroom, Joyce repeatedly asked her teacher, Mr. Nelson, to be sent back to the general education classroom, stating, "I want to be with my friends"; "I'm too smart to be with this reading group"; and "Please, I'll do anything to go back to Mr. Lane's class—I'll even be good." Mr. Nelson and Mr. Lane held a conference about what to do with Joyce's behavior. Mr. Lane reported that when he provided Joyce with oral feedback (e.g., "Joyce, stop doing that"; "Will you please do as I ask?"), it was ineffective. Mr. Nelson reported that when Joyce was inappropriate in his room, the oral feedback he used (e.g., "If you don't do what I ask, then you will go to ISS [in-school suspension]"; "This is an opportunity to change your behavior") was ineffective. Both teachers stated that Joyce would often argue with them about any type of feedback provided, and they would end up arguing with her about the point being made. At the annual individualized education program review, the committee decided that she needed to receive her primary reading instruction in the resource classroom until her behavior improved. In addition, the team agreed that Mr. Nelson should use oral feedback but change the focus of the feedback as a means to encourage Joyce to behave appropriately. Mr. Nelson agreed to implement a different form of verbal feedback.

Thus, Joyce's teachers believed that a teacher-mediated strategy such as oral or visual feedback could be beneficial.

In this strategy, “in which the teacher . . . takes responsibility for treatment, manipulating antecedents and/or consequences . . . to improve the academic performance of the student” (Pierce, Reid, & Epstein, 2004, p. 176). A recent literature review of teacher-mediated strategies used with students with EBD (Pierce et al.) called for additional experimental studies and recommended such studies be conducted with female and minority students. In Joyce’s case, Mr. Nelson sought the assistance of the first author in implementing a teacher-mediated oral feedback strategy.

The first author observed Joyce during reading instruction across several days in the resource classroom. On the basis of those observations, *appropriate behavior* was defined as compliance to the teacher’s directives within 12 s, keeping hands and eyes on required materials, and talking about related topics. *Inappropriate behavior* was defined as Joyce engaging in any combination of the following behaviors for 12 s or more: talking to teachers or peers about unrelated topics, refusing orally or nonverbally to comply with teacher directives within 12 s, or slamming required materials on the desk or floor. Using a 30-s momentary time-sampling data collection system, the first author and a paraprofessional recorded whether Joyce displayed appropriate or inappropriate behavior during her 25-min reading class.

Joyce’s teachers agreed that the momentary time-sampling method would be best because of its ease and nonintrusiveness during instruction. Mr. Nelson and Mr. Lane agreed that while teaching, they could collect these data, which could be beneficial for meeting Joyce’s needs in the general and special education classrooms. In addition, the paraprofessional could conduct interobserver reliability checks in both settings.

During small-group reading instruction (i.e., baseline) for Joyce, the mean of intervals of appropriate behaviors was 24.2% ($SD = 21.77\%$, range = 0–78%). Mr. Nelson stated that Joyce often asked about her performance and wanted to know the percentage of correct answers on assignments. On the basis of Joyce’s desire to know the status of her performance, Mr. Nelson and Mr. Lane set an 85% appropriate behavior goal that Joyce would need to reach 3 days in a row in the resource classroom during reading instruction before she would be allowed to return to the general education classroom for reading instruction. The goal set was determined by reports from both of her teachers who stated that her peers are appropriate on an average of 85% of the time during reading instruction. Past research has suggested that goal setting with students with EBD can maximize students’ improved performance (Ruth, 1996).

Mr. Nelson and the first author had a conference with Joyce regarding the need for Joyce to engage in more appropriate behavior during reading instruction; they stated that they understood she wanted to return to the general education classroom. Joyce agreed to try something different for

the next reading class and stated, “I really want to be taught reading in Mr. Lane’s class.”

On Day 11, Mr. Nelson implemented oral feedback with Joyce. A four-step process was written on a notecard (see Appendix A) and followed at the end of each reading class. First, Mr. Nelson told Joyce the percentage of intervals of appropriate behavior she had displayed on the previous day. Second, the teacher told Joyce the percentage of intervals of appropriate behavior she had displayed for the current class period and whether that percentage was the same, better, or worse. If her behavior improved, she was praised (e.g., “Way to go, Joyce! You were on task 78% of the observed intervals.”) Third, Mr. Nelson reminded Joyce that her goal was to reach 85% for 3 days in a row and, at that time, she would be allowed to return to the reading instruction provided in her general education classroom. Fourth, if Joyce reached the 85% goal, the teacher told her, “Keep it up” for 2 (or 1) more days. As Woolfolk (1990) recommended, oral feedback is concise, to the point, and without subjectivity. This was important for Joyce because she had a history of arguing with teachers when provided with positive or negative feedback.

After Joyce received 5 days of oral feedback, she displayed a mean of 63.4% ($SD = 9.37\%$, range = 50–70%) of intervals of appropriate behavior during reading instruction. Because Joyce did not reach the 85% goal when Mr. Nelson provided oral feedback, it meant that the fourth step of the feedback was not implemented. Although Joyce improved from baseline, both of her teachers were concerned that she would not meet her goal and would begin to exhibit more inappropriate behavior.

Mr. Nelson, Mr. Lane, and the first author discussed Joyce’s data and decided to add visual feedback to the oral feedback Joyce was receiving. Mr. Nelson stated that Joyce used many performance charts in his class as part of their classroom management system and individual goals. In addition, he stated that Joyce frequently reviewed those charts and made positive comments about her performance (e.g., “See, I did well yesterday on my assignment”). Mr. Nelson also stated that the addition of visual feedback was desirable and would require little time to implement. With that in mind, they decided that Joyce might better benefit from a combination of oral and visual feedback.

On Day 16, the teacher provided Joyce with oral and visual feedback. Before the reading class, she was told that she would receive oral feedback on her performance and see her level of performance displayed on a chart. Her appropriate behavior data from baseline and oral feedback phase were graphed, mean lines were added, and the 85% goal was highlighted. At the end of each reading class, the four-step oral feedback process was followed with two additional steps added to the note card. In the fifth step, Joyce was shown her graphed data, including the

percentage from the current day. In the sixth step, Joyce was asked to restate the goal (85% for 3 days in a row) and what would happen when she reached her goal.

For 6 days, the teacher provided Joyce with oral and visual feedback. During that time, she had a mean of 85.8% ($SD = 5.19\%$, range = 80–94%) appropriate behavior. On the 6th day of this phase, Joyce met her goal. On the following day, she returned to the general education classroom to receive her reading instruction.

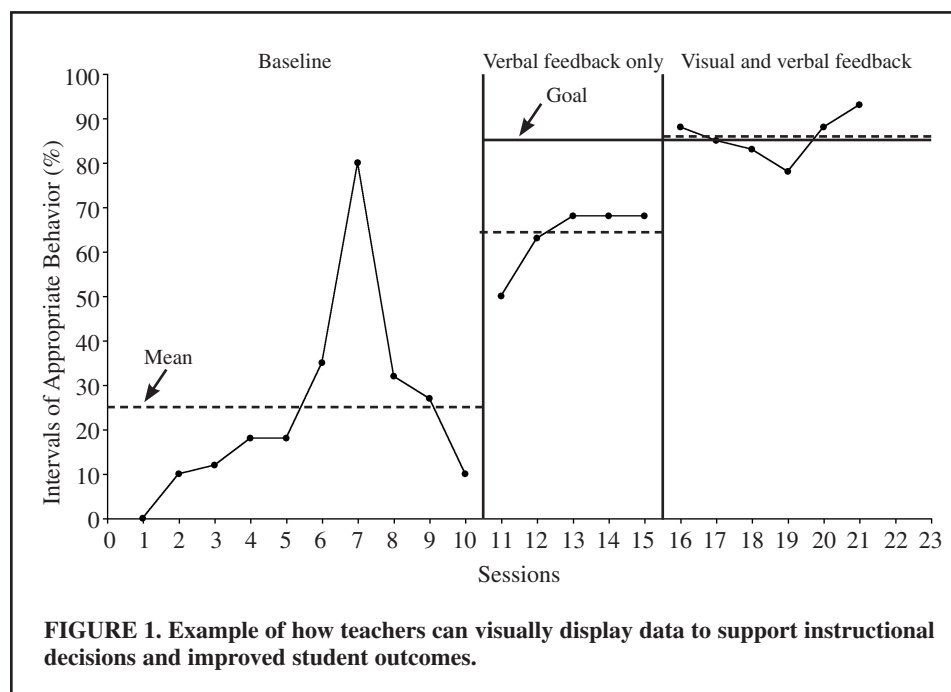
Mr. Lane and the paraprofessional continued to collect data on Joyce and used oral and visual feedback to reinforce her displays of appropriate behavior. To date, Joyce remains in the general education classroom for her reading instruction.

In Joyce's case, a combination of oral and visual feedback as a teacher-mediated strategy was effective in improving the social performance of a student with EBD. This teacher-mediated strategy focused on the behaviors that the student should engage in and provided the teachers and student with a tangible preset goal and reinforcer. The oral feedback that Joyce received changed from statements with the words *don't*, *stop*, *quit* and ultimatums to neutral and positive statements linked specifically to her percentage of appropriate behavior. In addition, the oral feedback focused on her appropriate, not inappropriate, behaviors. The visual feedback that Joyce received eliminated verbal arguments that she had once engaged in with her teachers when corrected. Prater (1994) stated that when teachers use concrete evidence (e.g., graph, chart) as a form of feedback, it decreases the likelihood that the student with EBD will argue or misconstrue what happened. Also, the oral and

visual feedback process that the teacher used with Joyce was cost effective and easy to implement and maintain. For example, to implement this strategy, the teachers did not need any special supplies or training. The teachers stated that the data-collection system and change in their verbal interactions with Joyce was easy and helped to promote a more positive relationship between Joyce and the teachers.

Future Directions and Implications

Many students with EBD are not engaged in the same amount of instructional time as are students without EBD (because of the former's inappropriate behavior; Johns, 2000). Before the oral and visual feedback strategy, this fact applied to Joyce, who was often removed from the instructional setting and, thus, missed crucial instructional time. As a result, her reading performance grades were low, and she was making minimal progress in the general education curriculum. If students with EBD are going to make progress in the general education curriculum, then a variety of individualized interventions for students need to be implemented to ensure academic and behavioral success. Through the use of a combined oral and visual feedback intervention, Joyce's appropriate behavior increased to the point of meeting the established behavioral goal, resulting in her return to the general education classroom. Although positive outcomes were observed using oral and visual feedback for this particular student, the results should be interpreted with caution. Our case study lacks a research design that examines the effects of the intervention under experimental conditions. In the future, researchers should



focus on replicating specific types of feedback with samples of people other than students with EBD.

Oral and visual feedback during academic instruction for students with EBD is a viable teacher-mediated strategy that focuses on and promotes positive behavior without specialized training, materials, and intensive time. Teachers can easily incorporate this strategy into the regular instructional routine in the classroom by simply giving their students specific feedback at the end of the lesson. In addition, the feedback can be easily altered to meet a variety of academic and social situations, settings, and students. Appendix B identifies tips for teachers who may want to try incorporating more feedback into their daily instructional routines. In addition, the use of data is important for informing teachers and students on the effectiveness of the intervention. Figure 1 provides an example of how teachers can visually display data to support instructional decisions and support improved student outcomes. Hattie and Timperley (2007) stated, "Feedback is one of the most powerful influences on learning and achievement" (p. 81). Thus, combined oral and visual feedback appears to be a viable intervention strategy to improve outcomes for students with EBD.

AUTHOR NOTES

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APPENDIX A
Verbal and Visual Feedback Note Card Prompt for the Teacher

After recording Joyce's appropriate behavior during a 25-min reading class, calculate percentage and complete the following steps:

Step	Prompt	Verbal	Visual
1	Tell Joyce her percentage of appropriate behavior from yesterday's class.	_____	
2	Tell Joyce her percentage of appropriate behavior in today's class; tell Joyce if her percentage was the same, better, or different from yesterday's; if better, verbally praise Joyce.	_____	
3	Tell Joyce her goal is to have an 85% for 3 days in a row and then she can return to her general education reading class.	_____	
4	If Joyce has an 85% or higher, verbally praise and tell her the remaining number of days. (Graph the percentage of appropriate behavior and highlight 85% goal.)	_____	
5	Show Joyce the graphed percentage from her previous class or classes and her current percentage.		_____
6	While showing Joyce her graph and pointing to the highlighted goal, tell her to restate her goal while looking at graph.		_____

APPENDIX B
Tips on Giving Verbal and Visual Feedback (From J. Hattie & H. Timperley, 2007)

Teachers should:

- clarify goals with the student.
- provide immediate feedback.
- use behavior-specific or task-related feedback.
- conduct private feedback conferences, use data to provide feedback, monitor progress, and refine interventions as needed.

Teachers should avoid:

- unrealistic goals.
- generic praise or personal feedback (e.g., "Good girl!").
- delays in feedback.

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